



Nombre _____

Clase _____

Instrucciones: Leer y "highlight" las cosas interesantes.

El Día de los Muertos

Day of the Dead

Can you imagine eating candy skulls, spending the night at a cemetery, or preparing special food for a dead relative? These are things Mexican children look forward to on **El Día de los Muertos**, the Day of the Dead. It's not a spooky time, like Halloween. Los Días de los Muertos (November 1 and 2) is a time to celebrate and honor the dead. Ancient Mexicans believed dead people moved on to a different world. Death was another kind of living. Spanish priests, wanting to replace the indígena religion with the Catholic one, tried to stop the people's celebrations for the dead. When that didn't work, they combined the traditions with the ancient Catholic holy days for the dead, All Souls and All Saints Days, on November 1 and 2.

During the last week of October, markets fill with foods, flowers, and toys for celebrating El Día de los Muertos. You can buy **pan de los muertos** (bread for the dead) or **calaveras de azúcar** (sugar skulls). Children love to eat them and to give them to their friends. As El Día de los Muertos gets closer, homes fill with the smells of chocolate and chiles. Everyone cooks special foods like tamales and chicken mole. They gather the food and flowers they will need to celebrate.

On November 1 and 2, whole families get together to clean and decorate their relatives' graves. They make paths of marigolds or candles to guide the spirits. They build altars at churches and graveyards. Each altar is different. The family arranges marigolds, candles, incense, and a photo of the dead person on an embroidered tablecloth. They add fruits, flowers, and the dead person's favorite foods. They decorate graves of dead children with sugar skulls, toys, and Mexican chocolate.

On the night of November 1, everyone meets at the graveyard. Many Mexicans believe that spirits return that night to meet with the living. They take food for everyone, including the dead. It is an exciting time . . . a time to remember aunts and grandparents, a time to feel their presence, a time to be together with all the family, living and dead.

"It is perhaps true
one lives on earth.
But not forever on earth,
just a little while here.
Although it is jade,
it breaks.
Although it is gold,
it breaks.
Although it is
quetzal feathers,
it tears.
Not forever on earth,
just a little while here."

—Náhuatl poem

Esqueletos y Calaveras

Skeletons and Skulls

Skeletons aren't scary to Mexicans. They are funny. At El Día de los Muertos, children can buy little scenes of skeletons going to school, getting a haircut, or getting married. There are all kinds of skeleton puppets and toy skeletons that move every which way. There are even skeleton jokes! No wonder. Mictlantecuhltli, the Aztec god of death, was a skeleton with a smile! People write *calaveras* (skull jokes) about living people and put them in the newspaper. One said, "I already saw your skull with

your four teeth and one molar." This *calavera* was written about a famous potter, Teodora Blanco.

Al estar haciendo un jarro
a Teodora sorprendió
la parca y la convirtió
en muñequito de barro.

One day she was making a pot
When death came paying a call,
He startled Teodora
And turned her to a clay doll.

Pan de los Muertos y Chocolate Caliente

Bread for the Dead and Hot Chocolate

In October and early November, look for loaves of *pan de los muertos* at *panaderías* (Mexican bakeries). You'll recognize them by their dough decorations . . . little birds, spirit people, or other figures on top, and braid around the edges. Flavored with orange and anise (licorice), *pan de los muertos* is delicious with Mexican hot chocolate.

Middle Americans considered chocolate a drink for important people and gods. They used cocoa beans as a kind of money and drank chocolate on special occasions. You can buy blocks of Mexican chocolate in many supermarkets. It is made of chocolate, vanilla, almond, and cinnamon, and comes in colorful boxes. Follow the instructions on the box. Try using a traditional *molinillo* (beater) to make your chocolate foam!

